



Coaching, Evaluating and Delivering Constructive Feedback – Learning Series

Coaching, Evaluating and Delivering Constructive Feedback – Topic #1:

What is Coaching?

Commonwealth Managers and Supervisors,

Welcome to the first in a series of communications that discuss the value that coaching brings to your management and supervision practice and team leadership. This message introduces coaching as a way of supporting and developing the people who report to you. To review the initial message introducing the program, please click here [Series Kickoff](#). The content presented will address the basics, benefits, and keys to successful coaching. This topic also includes a Reflection Points worksheet to help you get started recognizing your coaching relationships and identifying the coaching characteristics you would like to possess and display.

If you would like to provide feedback on this topic, please send your feedback to HRDTraining@Massmail.State.MA.US. Your feedback is welcomed, and will inform enhancements to future iterations of this program.

Thanks for all you do.

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Overview: What is Coaching?

Coaching is a communication process used to teach or train people. By utilizing the coaching process Commonwealth Managers and Supervisors will enable staff to achieve their goals and develop professionally in the workplace. This topic will provide you with the coaching basics and explain how coaching is commonly used in the workplace.

Coaching is an approach to people management focused on developing employees' potential. It is a two-way conversation that helps people to realize their own resourcefulness to achieve the results they want from their life or work.

Though it is tempting to think of a coach as the person on the sidelines with a track suit and whistle barking orders during a game, much of the real work of coaching is done behind the scenes developing relationships with individual team members and encouraging talented individuals to work together for the benefit of the team and each other.



Coaching is a form of managing performance that extends beyond the traditional performance review process or systems (e.g., ACES, EPRS) and supports employees on an ongoing, consistent, year-round basis in meeting their goals.

Implemented effectively, coaching is an important component of building a high-performing team that benefits the employee, the Manager or Supervisor, and the organization as a whole.

COACH stands for these five steps:

- **C**onnecting with the employee
- **O**bserving his or her job performance
- **A**ssessing overall performance to select a high Return on Investment area for coaching
- **C**onversing with the employee about performance-improvement ideas
- **H**oning the employee's skills

Coaching is a relationship, built over time, and can also include specific guidance through issues or projects. You may be coaching an employee who wants to get to the next level but needs to sharpen his or her skills in a certain area. As a coach, you'll provide both the broad view of the path ahead, but also pinpoint specific opportunities for growth. This can happen on a given project and by taking advantage of informal opportunities to pass along motivational or developmental feedback.

Here is an example demonstrating the importance of a coaching role.

Ryan's employee Jakarta has expressed interest in moving up in the organization. Jakarta is a stand-out employee within Ryan's work group, but she has little experience supervising. Recently Ryan's section chief was transferred to another division leaving Ryan to now directly supervise four staff members. Needing to fill the now vacant supervisory position Ryan decides it is the right time to begin discussing this potential promotional opportunity with Jakarta. Since Ryan has engaged Jakarta in a coaching relationship for the past six months it will be easy to bring this matter up with her during one of their regular supervisory meetings. By including discussions about supervisory responsibilities and the skills needed to supervise the work group in his coaching sessions with Jakarta, Ryan believes she will be better prepared to effectively move into a supervisory role.

Benefits of Coaching

The benefits of coaching are outlined below:

- Opens communication channels
- Builds trust between Manager or Supervisor and employee
- Increases employee engagement
- Provides time for Manager or supervisor to work on other high priority work areas through delegation
- Encourages employees to participate in problem-solving and solution-building
- Proactive rather than reactive approach to improving performance
- Reduces the potential stress around the annual review process with a “no surprises” approach to managing performance
- Demonstrates employer diligence in employee situations that later end in discipline or termination (fairness and documentation are key)

Keys to Coaching

Coaching is about relationship building: Commonwealth Managers and Supervisors should encourage employees to share their questions, concerns, opinions, and ideas. Through effective coaching techniques such as active listening, questioning, and acknowledging, the coach helps the employee decide what solution is appropriate for him or her. Though the coach holds the employee accountable for goals through regular meetings and follow-up, the coach does not have to be the initiator of the process or even any given conversation; the employee can sometimes take the lead.

Coaching has both formal and informal components: In addition to the requirements around the annual performance review process, effective coaches take advantage of informal opportunities to provide both motivational and developmental feedback to the employee about performance.

Coaching puts the emphasis on what people can achieve: Coaching is a process that can enable career enhancement and maximize performance. It allows people to connect with one another through active listening, asking thought-provoking and challenging questions, and acknowledging or validating the abilities in each person. Successful coaching addresses day to day performance improvement while setting the stage for the employee's professional development and personal satisfaction.

Positive ideas trump negative feedback: Coaching conversations are often framed as attempts to solve problems or overcome the employee's weakness or current workplace struggle. Try the opposite approach of profiting from opportunities and building upon the employee's strengths. If you observe performance or habits in an employee that you feel the need to discuss with someone else as either a problem or a great contribution, consider this a coaching opportunity. Try approaching the employee directly with your observation. Be prepared with specific details and, if there is a problem, propose more effective alternatives to what you have observed.

Coaching requires leading by example: Good coaches are mindful of communication style and project respect and understanding to those around them. Model a key component of

lifelong learning by using mistakes as an opportunity for learning or by creating a teachable moment. Be open to receiving feedback on your coaching. The best coaches learn from those around them, including their employees. Model the 'best practices' of receiving feedback, such as listening, confirming understanding, and responding in a non-defensive manner.

Glossary of Terms

To aid or refresh your understanding of the terminology used in this message, definitions of commonly used words are provided below:

- **ACES:** Achievement Competency and Enhancement System; the annual Commonwealth performance process for management employees
- **Coach:** noun: The person providing the coaching; typically the Manager or supervisor; verb: To encourage, motivate and guide; to direct toward a path of improvement
- **Developmental Feedback:** Information provided to an employee about his or her performance with the intent of changing behavior that is inappropriate and/or ineffective
- **Emotional Intelligence:** The ability to perceive and manage emotions in yourself and others; also referred to as "EQ" (emotional quotient)
- **Employee:** The individual receiving coaching; typically the staff person
- **EPRS:** Employee Performance Review System; the annual Commonwealth performance review process for non-management and confidential employees
- **Managing Performance:** Managing performance is an ongoing, continuous process of communicating and clarifying job responsibilities, priorities and performance expectations in order to ensure mutual understanding between supervisor and employee. It is a philosophy which values and encourages employee development through a style of management which provides frequent feedback and fosters teamwork
- **Motivational Feedback:** Information provided to an employee about his or her performance with the intent of sustaining behavior that is appropriate and/or effective
- **Professional Development:** Attainment or advancement of specific skills required for a certain job or profession
- **ROI:** Return on Investment; a measure of actual or perceived value of specific actions or behaviors
- **Teachable Moment:** An unplanned opportunity that arises when a coach has an opportunity to share insights with an employee

Next Steps

Activity: To reinforce your understanding of the basics, benefits, and keys to coaching, please take a moment to complete the following worksheet:

- [Coaching Reflection Points Worksheet: Who is your coach? Who are you coaching?](#)

Coming Next: Planning for Coaching can be an important step in the coaching process and is the next topic in this series. It will provide you with the necessary steps and strategies required to implement effective coaching.